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Central Illinois, Chicago advocates for organ/tissue donation honored by region's donation network

ELMHURST, Ill. (August 19, 2002) – In Illinois, more than 4,700 people are waiting for lifesaving organ transplants. Four Illinoisans have been honored for their volunteerism to encourage people to pay attention to that fact and do something about it – to decide to become organ donors and tell their families about that decision.

Gift of Hope Organ & Tissue Donor Network has honored these four advocates with its annual “Echo of Life” awards, in recognition of their extraordinary volunteer efforts to educate the public about organ and tissue donation.

Those honored were:

- Charles Harmony, Springfield;
- Roger Grandys, Schaumburg;
- Glenda Fulton, Chicago, for her work on behalf of the Gift of Hope African American Task Force; and
- Ana Quintana, Chicago, for her efforts with the Gift of Hope Hispanic Task Force.

The four along with more than 400 other Gift of Hope volunteers have helped double the number of donation education programs taking place in Illinois and northwest Indiana schools, businesses and communities. That impact is a factor in increasing donation rates – 2002 is on track toward becoming one of the region's most successful years in terms of lives saved, said Gift of Hope President/CEO Jerry Anderson.

“So far in 2002, 200 families have consented to organ donation – which has resulted in 520 lifesaving transplants,” Anderson said. “Educating the public before they ever face the decision to donate plays an important role in making that happen, and that is what our volunteers do throughout the year.

“We recognize our Echo of Life award winners as those who set outstanding leadership examples in their communities by developing programs, supporting other volunteers and families, and leading the way in speaking out for the critical need for organ and tissue donation. Every day, the need grows as 100 people are added to the national transplant waiting list and 17 more die while waiting for donated organs that never become available.”

Gift of Hope Organ & Tissue Donor Network is the federally mandated not-for-profit organ procurement organization (OPO) that works with hospitals and families in Illinois and northwest Indiana to coordinate organ and tissue donation. Among the nation's largest OPOs, it worked with the families of 250 donors to make possible 792 lifesaving organ transplants in 2001. Additionally, 588 families consented to tissue donation, enabling thousands of patients to receive medical transplants of heart valves, bone and other tissue.

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Harmony, a liver transplant recipient, is active with Gift of Hope's Springfield volunteer organization, working with other volunteers and partner organizations on programs observing National Donor Sabbath in November and National Organ and Tissue Donor Awareness Week in April. Among the programs he provided this year were with the Jacksonville Chamber of Commerce and EMI Distribution in Springfield, in addition to programs he has initiated at his workplace with the Sangamon County Circuit Clerk's Office.

Grandys joined the Gift of Hope Volunteer Bureau a few months after receiving a lifesaving heart transplant in 1998. He initiates and staffs donor education programs in the northwest suburban area and works with Gift of Hope Community Relations Specialist Mike Henderson to help train new volunteers. In the last year, he has committed more than 70 hours to programs with the Palatine Post Office, the Haddassah, Loyola University and the East Bank Club in Chicago, among others.

Fulton promotes the need for organ and tissue donation among African-Americans locally and nationally in her role with the Gift of Hope African-American Task Force and its community outreach initiatives. The African-American Task Force conducts programs almost daily and participates in Chicago's Unity Fair, Today's Black Woman Expo, health fairs and other events throughout the Chicago metropolitan area and other communities. Its signature programs are the annual Candlelight Bowl during National Organ and Tissue Donor Awareness Week, and the annual AATF Gala.

Quintana is president of the Gift of Hope Hispanic Task Force, working in the Hispanic community with families whose language and culture call for specific outreach to address their needs and understanding of organ and tissue donation. In the last year as a Hispanic Task Force advocate, she has taken a leadership role in organizing programs, recruiting new Task Force participation and facilitating initiatives such as "Celebracion de la Vida" – a celebration of life in the Hispanic community during National Organ and Tissue Donor Awareness Week.

Everyone is urged to get the facts on donation, make the decision to become a donor and discuss the decision with family members. Organizations and employers are urged to provide donation awareness programs for employees, customers and community members. Call the Gift of Hope Education Hotline at 888/307-DON8 or visit www.giftofhope.org.

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